

Wrestling Perspective

• Analysis and Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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Can Sid Do Justice To The WWF Title?

By - David Skolnick

If recent titleholders are any indication, Sid Justice fits the mold of the ideal WWF champion: big on muscle and charisma and short on wrestling talent. If pushed properly, Justice can become the next Hulk Hogan. But the WWF has to be careful not to fall into the trap they did with the Ultimate Warrior - having Hogan overshadow the champion.

During Justice's WCW tenure, it was obvious he was going to be the next major superstar in the business. The only problem was WCW apparently had no clue what to do with him. Justice was also a WWF wrestler in the NWA/WCW world. His jump to the WWF, and the battle WCW fought to keep him, ensured his success would come immediately. Most wrestling experts assumed Justice was promised the Wrestlemania main event. Until a few weeks ago, it appeared he was going to win the world title. A bicep injury has put Justice on the disabled list for a few months, but he should return to action prior to Wrestlemania.

Justice will most likely be the biggest wrestling attraction during the nineties. He has tremendous charisma that comes across without the utterance of a syllable. His one major drawback is he is prone to injuries. Both his own and those he inflicts on others. He was out of action with WCW for half a year with a punctured lung. This recent injury can easily lead to a bad reputation for Justice, who already has one for other reasons. Admittedly, he is a below average worker, but since when has that been a factor in the WWF?

Hogan signed with the WWF in 1983, with skills mirroring those of 'Vicious', and he quickly became the single most recognizable wrestler in the past twenty years. His ring work is hardly important. It's his charisma that keeps him on top. The same could be said for his first successor, the Ultimate Warrior. No one ever said he was Ric Flair or Barry Windham in the ring, but there was something about him, notably his body combined with his strange charisma, that made him such a popular wrestler. But with the Warrior, the WWF pushed their champion as the ultimate second fiddle to Hogan and never gave him the chance to show if he could carry the company's torch. Ultimately, the Warrior failed and has since faded from the scene.

The question is what does Justice have that the Warrior didn't? Examining his push, Justice seems to have the front office support the Warrior so desperately needed. Warrior had the physical tools to be the company's number one man, but during his first few months as champion, Hogan's injury at the hands of Earthquake, and his subsequent retirement angle, was the focal point for the company. At SummerSlam, the first PPV after Warrior's victory over Hogan, his match against Rick Rude was overshadowed. This trend continued until Warrior lost the title. If Justice is to be a successful world champion, he has to appear to the fans as the top star of the promotion.

Hogan will always have strong support, so it's important when Justice wins the World Title, for Hogan to endorse Justice, give his blessing and fade from the scene. At that point, Justice should be given the push the Warrior should have received during his championship tenure. Just like the Warrior, Justice's wrestling ability is not important. In the WWF, it is clearly style over substance. Justice doesn't have to wrestle like a world champion, he just has to look like one. He has unlimited drawing potential in the number one position if Hogan truly is looking to slow down. Justice clearly has to show he is committed to the company. Hogan only wants to work weekends. The Warrior wanted a similar contract and was subsequently suspended. The WWF needs a full-time world champion. Does Justice want to play softball or be the World Champion? There's a lot more money in the ring for him then on the field, no matter how far he hits the softball. It is up to Justice to make that decision. He has a world of promise as WWF champion. After two years of waiting for that potential to be tapped, the opportunity is staring Justice in the face. He has the WWF's support, that same support he desperately needed in WCW. Now it's Justice's chance to show that he does rule the world.

Sidelines

Thanks To Wade Keller and Evan Ginzburg for the plugs. We appreciate their support.

Letters To The Editors • Keep them coming as we value your input and thoughts about this publication.

It's Not A Bird, It's Not A Bee, it's the Wrestling Perspective Submission Manual. The perfect guide for anyone who wishes to submit an article for publication to Wrestling Perspective. Simply drop us a note and we'll send you a copy. It's as simple as that.

Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly is the sharp looking, weekly, information packed, opinionated bulletin put out by Wade Keller. If you haven't read Wade's interview with Jim Cornette, referenced in this issue, you owe it to yourself to do so. Each issue features news, results, commentary and interviews twice a month. It truly is one of the underground's best values. Also, Wade just released his latest annual featuring interviews with Bill Watts and Lou Thesz, an article by Paul on how Pay-Per-View works and much more. The annual is another bargain at only \$10.00. *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* is available for \$1.25 per issue from Wade Keller at PO Box 201844, Minneapolis, MN 55420.

Don't Miss Our Next Issue as we'll have part II of our Stan Lane interview, which you really don't want to miss, commentary, letters(?) and lots of other fun stuff.

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An Interview with Stan Lane

For the past nine years, Stan Lane has been one of the most successful tag team wrestlers in professional wrestling. As member of the Fabulous Ones with Steve Keirn, he helped set attendance and gate records in Memphis that have yet to be equalled. After the break up of the Fabulous Ones, Lane went on to team with Bobby Eaton to form the third, and most successful, version of the Midnight Express. Managed by Jim Cornette, the Midnight Express combined solid technical skills, timing, chemistry and non-stop action to become the most respected tag team in the business. Their feuds with the Rock & Roll Express and the Fantastics set the standards by which tag team wrestling is judged.

Stan Lane's career is storied one. From his debut 12 years ago, to his current status as one of the most talented and charismatic performers in professional wrestling, Lane has consistently remained one of the most entertaining wrestlers in the business. In this interview, conducted by Paul MacArthur on October 10, 1991, Lane discusses his entrance into professional wrestling, being trained by Ric Flair, the Fabulous Ones, the Midnight Express, the current status of professional wrestling and much more.

Wrestling Perspective: How did you get started?

Stan Lane: I was living in Myrtle Beach, this was back in the summer of 1978. I was a bouncer in a night club called Mother Fletcher's and I also worked room service at the Myrtle Beach Hilton. One morning, I just happened to see an order down for four Bloody Marys to room so-and-so and it said "Flair." I said, "I wonder if that could be Ric Flair?" So I quickly grabbed the order and I filled it. (Laughs) Four Bloody Marys about seven or eight in the morning. I carried it up there and knocked on the door and sure enough, the champ answered the door and I said, "Nature Boy." He was real friendly and I went in there and he and I talked briefly. At that time I was even bigger than I am now. I weighed about 230 pounds and I worked out real hard and of course I was a lot younger too (laughs). Anyway, he and I just sort of hit it off, you know, and he asked me about some gyms in the area and I told him. I also mentioned a pool party at this other hotel that would be happening the following day and sure enough the next day, at the Landmark Hotel in Myrtle Beach, Ric Flair, Blackjack Mulligan and Greg "The Hammer" Valentine showed up. So Ric and I talked a little bit more and I invited him to the bar where I worked, Mother Fletcher's. He came by there that night and we talked some more and I got his phone number. He said, "If you ever want to think about professional wrestling for a career, give me a call."

I was also lifeguarding part-time down there at the beach at that time. So, when the season closed down there after Labor Day, I called Ric. He said, "Drive on down" and I did and he personally trained me in his backyard for about six weeks. I was and I still am the only person he ever personally trained like that. And that's how it all started. I finished my training and I packed my car and I headed out from Greensboro, North Carolina, this is where my parents lived at the time, and headed out to Amarillo, Texas in January of 1979, which was my first territory.

WP: Who were you working for then?

SL: That territory had just been bought out by Dick Murdoch and Blackjack Mulligan. They had it for a short time. It wasn't real successful for them. But I was there approximately three months.

WP: And where did you move on from there?

SL: After that, I headed out over to Louisiana and I worked for Bill Watts, for about nine months. After that, Dusty Rhodes, who had worked some shots for Bill Watts, saw me

and liked my abilities and he brought me to Florida and that's where I got my first real break. Brian St. John was my first tag team partner. He and I were the Florida Tag Team Champions. We defeated two legends in the sport, Ray Stevens and Eddie Graham. So I stayed in Florida for approximately a year.

After that, where did I go (laughs)? I went up to Atlanta, Georgia, and worked there for about six months under Ole Anderson, who was in charge there. After that, I think Ole quit and Robert Fuller came in. After talking to Robert, I went down and worked in Pensacola, Florida, for Robert's brother, Ron. I stayed there for about four months. While there, I met Mr. Saito and he got me booked in Japan. I went to Japan for five weeks, came back, took a couple of months off and then I went out to Tennessee and worked for Jerry Jarrett. I had a very long successful run there for about four years as the Fabulous Ones, me and Steve Keirn.

WP: Now you had feuded with Keirn back in Florida before that.

SL: Yes.

WP: Did you find it easy to tag with him because you knew how he worked?

SL: Oh yeah, he and I hit it off real well. He and I were about the same size and even back then, we're talking about the mid-eighties, after growing beards, even looked alike, quite a bit. So it worked out for us real well.

WP: Was it Jarrett's idea to tag you two up?

SL: Yes, sure was.

WP: You were really the most successful team in the Memphis area ever.

SL: Yeah, I think, from what I've heard, we set attendance records there, and also picture sales records, that have never been equalled.

WP: How did it feel to be on top like that?

SL: It was great. It was a fun time for us. I made some good money there and we were fan favorites. I had basically been a rulebreaker from the first year or so of my career. There, having all the kids flock around us, and all the people love us, it was kind of fun.

WP: What do you think made the two of you so successful together?

SL: I think, basically what really launched the thing was the fact that the Fabulous Fargo Brothers had been mat stars in the late fifties and sixties and even up in to the early seventies. Jackie and his brother Roughhouse and also Donny Fargo were really big attractions there. Jackie Fargo was like mine and Steve's, not so much a manager, but a mentor. He got on the TV with us several times and made very nice comments about us. That he had formed us in the same vein as the Fabulous Fargos and was going to name us the Fabulous Ones in honor of them. So that really got us started on a strong foot.

WP: Now when you were working for Jarrett, you also did some time with the AWA or did it happen right after?

SL: Yes, after about a very successful three year run there, we left and went up to the AWA and worked for Verne Gagne for about 13 months. We wrestled against a lot of really big guys and also big names like the Road Warriors, Billy Robinson and Tony Atlas; guys of that caliber. After that we came back to the Jarrett territory again and stayed there for another year.

WP: How was it working for Verne Gagne?

SL: It was fun for us, because that was the first time we'd worked any major cities. Flying on planes. So it was rather glamorous for us. We'd fly from Minneapolis to San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas once a month. It was fun.

WP: You were programmed with the Warriors. What was it like working with them the first time?

SL: It was rough (laughs). Their two very big strong boys and they outweighed Steve and I probably about 60 to 70 pounds a piece. Wrestling them in their hometown with all their buddies there and stuff, rooting them on, was a little bit brutal for us. But it was good.

WP: Robinson must have been like a wrestling lesson.

SL: Yeah, Billy, I think after Steve and I left there, I think about a year or two later Billy retired. But he was still very good back then. I'm not sure how old he was, but he was in good shape. It was fun to watch him and work with him.

WP: Now the two of you reunited just within the past year.

SL: Yes.

WP: Obviously times have changed quite a bit since then. How would you compare it, or what was it like this time around?

SL: Well, yeah, you're right, things have changed. I think that area - Memphis, Nashville - has just seen so much for so long that nothing really turns them on anymore. They're sort of burned out. That's probably one of the last areas that runs shows on a weekly basis. I think that's something that's probably contributed to the fact that they're not drawing very good crowds down there now.

WP: Kind of like they're numb at this point.

SL: Yeah, I think they've seen so much, so often, for so long, they're just kind of numb to it.

WP: Eddie (Gilbert) running over Jerry Lawler with a car.

SL: (Laughs) Yeah, it's kind of hard to follow that.

WP: When you and Steve first broke up, that was down in Florida, when he semi-retired. What were your plans at that point? What did you think was going to happen?

SL: Well, I was sort of just wandering aimlessly (laughs) because Steve was, at that point, trying to branch out into the real estate business. His wife's father was in it. Steve was, at that point in his career, where he was getting a little bit tired of it. He just wanted to branch out, do something in the business world. So he just basically quit and I was just kind of left there thinking, "Well, should I stay here, be a singles or should I leave?" So I was kind of in a limbo zone there. Then the phone rang and that's when I got the call from Dusty to come up to Charlotte for an interview and that's how the Midnight Express with me in it started.

WP: What was that like?

SL: That was great too. As far as having great matches, probably my four or five years with Bobby and Jimmy were the highlight of my career as far as making good money and being on top. Bobby is one of, if not the best, tacticians around.

WP: You and Bobby seemed to gel, like immediately. The two of you were fluid right off the bat. Why do you think that was?

SL: I think Bobby could be probably be fluid with just about anybody (laughs). He's that good. I don't know. I guess it was just the kind of thing with Jimmy there and Bobby's ability and my martial arts stuff that I threw in there and my personality, I think kind of helped out. It was just one of those things. Just like, quote (laughs) "marriage made in heaven" there for a while.

WP: Just like a natural chemistry?

SL: Yeah, exactly.

WP: Jim said (in a Pro Wrestling Torch interview) working with him and Bobby is like a death tag. You've got his mouth and Bobby is Bobby. Did you ever worry about that? Or did you feel talented enough with your charisma and abilities?

SL: I was always confident enough in my own abilities not to be intimidated by either Jimmy or Bobby. I've always felt like I was good enough as far as having some flash and some moves to hold my own.

WP: What is your martial arts background?

SL: I studied a Japanese form of Karate back in the mid-seventies called Shotokan. I took that for about three years. I got my brown belt in that. I fought in tournaments for an additional two more years, which made it five years total. That I think helped me in the ring as far as doing some unique kicks and take downs.

WP: Giving you the educated feet, so to speak?

SL: Yes (laughs), in Jim Ross' words.

WP: How would compare working with Bobby versus working with Steve?

SL: Well, they're very different styles. Steve comes from the old Florida, Eddie Graham style, which is a very rugged amateur background enhanced type style. Where Bobby is more fast movement with a lot of aerial tactics. So they're just very, very different styles.

WP: When you feuded with the Rock and Roll Express a couple of times, how was it working with them? Was it enjoyable?

SL: Oh yes, definitely. I think, several years back Ricky Morton and Robert Gibson were the ultimate compliment as far as their styles versus Bobby and my styles. Same type of deal, we just sort of gelled. They're both very, very fast movement oriented type wrestlers. A lot of ups and downs and a lot of movement stuff. Their styles and the styles of the Midnight Express just, the chemistry was perfect for it.

WP: Another team you had a lot of chemistry with was the Fantastics. Would you say they were similar to work with?

SL: Very, very similar, yes. Very Similar.

WP: So it was easy to adapt to working with them?

SL: Yes.

WP: What was it like working for Dusty?

SL: You know, I like Dusty. He always, he was the guy who gave me my first break in Florida in 1980. He's also the guy who gave me my biggest break as a part of the Midnight Express in the late eighties. He's always helped me out a lot.

WP: You and Bobby had a lot of success. Can you compare the successes of the two teams?

SL: The basic comparison to be made is that the Fabulous Ones were like big fish in a small pond. Whereas the Midnight Express were like fairly big fish in a very big pond with a lot of other big fish. I mean back when Steve and I were working for Jerry, it was a very small territory and he and I were like the top dogs there. But, with the Midnight Express, we were working for a national promotion that had a lot of other very big names and big talents too. You know, a lot of tag teams, besides us were being featured like the Road Warriors, the Freebirds and the list goes on and on.

WP: When you went against the Road Warriors again, was it any different? Or were they still pretty brutal?

SL: They were a whole lot easier. I think they had mellowed a little bit over the years. They had learned a lot too. They're still hard workers and very, very strong guys. But they had learned I think to somewhat temper their tempers (laughs).

WP: Don't kill your opponent because they can't wrestle the next night.

SL: Yeah, please don't kill me (laughs).

WP: You mentioned working in Japan. It seems to be something some wrestlers do quite successfully. Is it something your considering?

SL: Well, I'll tell you, I've thought about it, but I just, the guys over there now, it's a very brutal competition oriented thing. You've got guys over there now, that from what I hear, are just practically killing themselves. The Japanese people seem to favor a lot of wild, wild, matches. I mean furniture being thrown, guys doing just wild, devastating, dangerous type moves. You know, diving off the top rope onto the floor and stuff. I'm just not really at that point in my career where I want to go over there and risk that.

WP: So the idea of trying the shooting star press doesn't seem favorable?

SL: Yeah (laughs).

Next month we'll have Part II of our Stan Lane interview, including Stan's insightful thoughts on WCW, the current status of wrestling, the future of the business and his own plans and pastimes.

Letters To The Editors

I gained an even greater respect for Ric Flair, after reading the quote attributed to him last issue. Perhaps it is a sign that those within the business are starting to realize that we hardcores love and respect the sport and the wrestlers themselves. Although he doesn't get close to the attention Hulk Hogan gets in the real world, Flair is the greatest wrestler of this era.

I must admit that my interest, already enormous, has picked up considerably lately. I just loved the angle involving Flair, Piper and McMahon. It was pure hardcore, vintage Flair. If he wasn't before, Flair made himself the lead heel in the promotion, if not the most hated. Can or will Flair influence the WWF? I wouldn't bet against it. The aforementioned angle is a positive sign that he is doing just that.

I miss Flair in WCW, but I have enjoyed much of what has been presented of late. Luger is a good champion, an excellent heel, and the programs with Windham and, especially, Simmons have been well done. Cactus Jack and Abdullah have added freshness to WCW that is sorely needed as well. Now if they could only get wrestling people to run the promotion. Concerning Luger's real life personality, I was told by an acquaintance, who sometimes works in the business, that Larry Pfohl is much like the heel Lex Luger. If true, then that should enhance his performance.

Wrestling has changed enormously in the last decade, some for the worse and some for the better. It is about to change again because the conditions are ripe for another revolution in the business. The flow of information due to the newsletters will be a determining factor in the outcome. Perhaps it will never be covered here as in Japan, but I foresee the truthful coverage of wrestling to expand greatly. All of us, fans and reporters, have a responsibility to see that such coverage is fair and open. The promotions can never get away with some of what was done before, because even the casual fans see through it. The spotlight must be kept on the sport if it is ever to revive in this country.

I love wrestling! I've been watching since I was a small child in the mid-sixties and I do remember Angelo Poffo. I want the sport to succeed at a level that would garner respect from the mainstream press. Those in wrestling must not forget that we hardcores are the most loyal fans they have.

Michael McGowen
Jerseyville, IL

I enjoyed the recent issue of *Wrestling Perspective*. I missed the Flair speech as I was in the restaurant with Bruno Sammartino at the time, so I am glad it was captured in print. Your comments on the increased responsibility for all newsletter editors is an important point that all of us must remember with every word we type.

Concerning Dave's excellent column on Lex Luger, I agree with his comments concerning the unfair treatment or attitude fans have had towards Luger, who truly is one of the few big men who has attempted to learn his craft. But, I believe Dave overestimated the negative reaction towards Luger. I have written and printed positive comments towards Luger. While the majority of the coverage of Luger has been negative, most of that concerned steroids and his negative influence on other wrestlers and prospective wrestlers. I don't think many dispute that he is talented, does pretty good interviews, and is at least a decent choice as World Champion.

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